

Staying in the place where you were called?

Trying to sort out what to do at the Fork
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1 Corinthians 7:17-24 (ESV)

“Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the congregations. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman in the Lord. Likewise he who is free when called a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; so not become slaves of men. So brothers, in whatever condition each was called, let him remain with God.”

To be honest with the reader, I am writing this paper for my own study and thought organization. I am at a fork in the road. One way leads to Salvation Army officer-ship, and a life immersed in The Salvation Army. The other way leads to living out my faith in the Jewish Messiah Yeshua by obeying the Torah. To be even more honest I cannot see these two lives coexisting side by side where I will be able to keep one foot on one road and one foot on the other and walk easily. Like I said it seems like a fork, and as we know, most of the time, a fork in the road only gets further apart! This paper is not dealing with the fact that I believe Torah is for me as a believer in Messiah. That has long since been a deep held belief of mine which I am beyond the shadow of a doubt convinced of. That could be a topic strong enough to stand on it's own, so I will not address anything regarding the matter in this paper.

Before I go any further I will give a little bit of my background and my involvement with The Salvation Army on a local level and then abroad. Then I will discuss the observations I have recently made in the Army about their attitude toward Torah, and Torah observance by soldiers, officers, and adherents. After this I hope to take a little bit deeper of a look at Paul's letter to the Corinthians concerning “staying in the place where you were first called.” Hopefully I will come to some sort of conclusion as to what HaShem is asking of me.

History and background in The Salvation Army

I grew up in a mostly secular home. Secular, meaning we went to church half of the time on Sundays and did youth group in middle school and high school. The rest of the time was spent listening to bad music, watching bad movies, and getting drunk on the weekends. (Sometimes weeknights.) My parents divorced early on when I was in the seventh grade. I lived for myself. I had not a care in the world about God, who was this abstract, distant figure in outer-space.

Later on in my latter teen years, I began to really feel the guilt and conviction of my lifestyle. I was nineteen years old and not going to church yet He was calling me out then. Even though He was calling me out, I was still not going to listen for another three years. I continued to live a life for myself, full of immorality, greed, drunkenness, and all kinds of other darkness. In those three years I had four jobs. I worked as either a pseudo-carpenter or a salesman in all four of them. A few years ago I was working for a local guitar shop, selling and repairing guitars and other instruments. I had just recently come out of a very destructive relationship and had plans to move to a coastal here in Oregon town and just live life.

This was up until I met a Salvation Army Captain. He and his family had just moved here from Colorado and he was new to the area. He asked me about teaching his younger son drum lessons. I agreed and before long I was playing drums in the worship group at the local Corps.

To make a long story short I realized the way I was living was not in line with what God had been desiring. So I made a decision at about eleven o'clock one night at the church to do my best to follow God and his will. Needless to say it wasn't just that easy. Since then, there has been many set-backs, hurdles, etc. But He has brought me further than I ever could have imagined. I ended up becoming engaged to and marrying the Captain's daughter and have been enjoying marriage for nearly six months.

In my three years in The Salvation Army I have been on what I would call a roller coaster ride of events and experiences. I have traveled more in the last three years than I have my entire life. Urbana, Urban Youth Workers Institute, Western Youth Institute, Hawaiian Islands Ministries Conference, Future Officer's Fellowship, are just a few of the conferences and events I have been to. I have led worship at territorial, and divisional events for The Salvation Army here and abroad. I was a part a traveling music group for the Army who toured around the west coast all summer long playing shows and feeding the homeless. I am currently the Praise and Worship leader-director here at the Corps, as well as the youth director. I am also very involved in the office end of many things here at the Corps. The Salvation Army is what pulled me out of the pit and gave me something new to live for and for that I feel that I am forever indebted to them.

I always thought that it was weird that the officers here didn't eat pork or shellfish. But once I sat down with them and began to ask them questions, the wheels began to turn.

My observations on The Salvation Army and Torah

Wasn't that something that only Jewish people did? Why would we be doing it? I was asking all the questions that anyone else would ask about the kosher dietary laws and any of the others. In all, my journey to Torah wasn't unlike many others. In fact it was a rather easy change to implement. I am still on this journey but have been ever increasingly aware of the difficulty it presents while trying to live Torah in the midst of such an anti-Torah Christian Church at large.

While on tour with the Hallelujah Road Show, I was the butt of many jokes, ridicule, and mockery. Frequently band members tried to "set me straight" on this Jewish stuff. I recall one time in the middle of a conversation about Torah when a team member said, "Where's your Bible at? I want to show you

just why I love to eat Pork!” Usually it was less invasive. Once when we were out at a breakfast diner in Tacoma WA and I was enjoying a couple pancakes and an orange juice when another teammate said, (as she was stuffing her mouth full of bacon) “I’m glad I’m not Jewish!” Everyone laughed and moved on. But I still got what she was hinting at. There was one team member whom I became very good friends with that summer. He was very interested in the hebraic roots of our faith. I showed him passages in in the Bible, let him read a book published by *First Fruits of Zion* as well as Tim Hegg’s ‘*It is often said*’ series¹ and had long conversations with him about Torah. By the end of the summer he was eating Kosher and wanting to learn more.

I have heard of Salvation Army officers who come across this Torah path and after a period of learning start to implement practices in their lives and the congregation they led. For example, there were a set of officers who began to realize the Jewishness of their faith in the Messiah and one winter season decided that God did not want them ringing bells on Shabbat, (Saturday.) Let’s just say that they are no longer with us.

Even more recently, we have begun to podcast here at the local Corps. Basically anyone in the world can listen to and subscribe to our sermons. I can recall a couple of times when our officer will give a fiery message to the congregation about obedience to the Word of God (from the correct, Hebraic stance) and shortly after it is podcasted he gets a phone call from someone saying that we should take down that week’s podcast. The officer’s here were called to a meeting in Portland where our Leadership sat down and talked with them. From what our officer told me, they said that from listening to our podcast, it sounded like we were “messianic.” We had plans here at the Corps to go through the book and workbook for D.T. Lancaster’s *Restoration* for Sunday School. Once the headquarters were informed of this they very quickly told us that we were not to do it.

I have also been at major Salvation Army events with many people in attendance and when someone sees my tzitzit will make a comment about it. And when I tell them that is my “prayer shawl” that I wear under my shirt they usually reply something like, “I don’t need that, I can pray in freedom.” What does that even mean? I refer to it as a ‘prayer shawl’ to better help those who aren’t familiar with the garment grasp the idea a little easier. Then I enlighten them and say that it is a direct commandment from God to wear tzitziyot to remind us of His commandments.

On a little bit different of a note. It has come to the point of people telling me I need to not let my tzitzit show. They say that no one should see them and that I should tuck them in to my pants. And that it is just oral tradition to wear a head covering or a kippah, so I shouldn’t wear them. What’s unfortunate is that some of these people are the same ones who turned me on to this journey.

Every now and then the question comes up while talking to like-minded people about our Hebraic roots. What would happen if they were asked to leave their congregation because of their ‘Jewish’ practices? Usually everyone says that they believe it will not happen and until it does they would never leave. They say something like, “It just says in too many portions of scripture to stay in the place where you were first called!”

A little less than a week ago I was sitting at home studying, and resting during Rosh Hashanah. I knew that my officer was down at the Corps working during the Holiday. A messianic friend and teacher of mine once told me this:

It is a little bit like Israel in Egypt. Sure Israel could "worship" HaShem in spirit and in heart, but the fulness of worship that He desired (i.e., the whole service of the Tabernacle) was impossible in Egypt. "Let my people go *that they may worship Me.*"

What a great analogy! I found myself wondering, at what point will I allow Him to have all of me; my wants, desires, my ideas, and most importantly, my priorities? When will we stop making excuses and deeply down worrying about our own priorities? I strongly believe that is why He gave us His Torah. So that we may think thoughts like Him, be in tune with Him, and to constantly be reminded why we were made; To worship Him with the way we live!

I am becoming more and more aware of the fact that this Torah lifestyle is extremely hard to live within the confines of mainstream Christianity. I personally don't want to practice a watered down version of Torah obedience in Messiah when it is just convenient for me to do so. I don't want Corps duties to get in the way of what God has set apart and sanctified. I don't want to have recovery-based meetings on Friday nights. I do not want to ring bells on Shabbat, I want to be gathering with other believers! I do not want to be slaving away at the Corps on Rosh Hashanah!

1 Corinthians 7:17

"Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches."

(English Standard Version © 2001 Crossway Bibles)

What exactly was Paul commanding the believers in Corinth to do here? Was he really telling them that they needed to remain in the Church where they came to know God and Messiah? If we read on a little bit Paul elaborates more on what he is talking about.

1 Corinthians 7:18-20

Was anyone at the time of his call circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commands of God. Each man should remain in the condition in which he was called.
(ESV)

Really this seems like a no-brainer. One can easily see that Paul was talking about circumcision, not about staying in the church where they were first called. However, translations can make this seem as if he was doing so. This is what the NIV translates this passage to:

1 Corinthians 7:17

Nevertheless each person should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This rule I lay down in all the churches.

(New International Version © 1973, 1978, 1984 Zondervan)

In verse twenty four later on it says this:

“Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to. (NIV)

Compared to the ESV translation of the same verse (24):

“So brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God. (ESV)

Now I would say that those translations have quite contrasting tones. The word translated to ‘condition’ is the Greek word ‘εν.’ It could also be better understood as ‘in,’ ‘by,’ ‘with,’ etc. It means ‘a fixed position,’ or ‘a state of being.’² Other usages for the word are a ‘certain time,’ or ‘place.’ However looking at the context in which Paul is writing, it seems more likely than not that he used the word ‘εν’ as a state of being circumcised or uncircumcised.

Conclusion

Again, I have heard this statement from many people. But I believe that staying in the place where you are called is not is not the message that Paul was trying to get across. Paul was explicitly trying telling the believer to not seek circumcision if they were not circumcised and if you were circumcised, not to seek to remove the marks of circumcision. But to “*remain in the the condition in which you were called.*”

What does this mean for me? This tells me that I must remain in the condition in which I was called. I must continue to study the Scriptures, advanced in knowledge and my walk with the Lord. Does this mean leaving The Salvation Army? Of that I am not sure. One thing I am sure of though is that I cannot compromise on my belief that the Torah of God is for today’s disciples of Yeshua. It’s the message Moses, Yeshua, and Paul taught and it is the message that I intend to live my life by.

Endnotes

¹ For ordering information go to www.torahresource.com

². More on this information is available at www.blueletterbible.org.